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A Summary of Lessons Learned

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Headquarters, U S Army Vietnam.

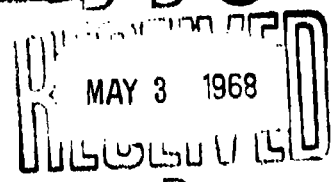
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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM
APO San Francisco 96307

AVDC

22 September 1965

SUBJECT: Summary of Lessons Learned

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. The attached document is a compilation of experiences and lessons learned during combat engagements with the Viet Cong. These lessons were derived by US units operating in all areas of the Republic of Vietnam. The purpose of this initial distribution is to give all United States forces in Vietnam an opportunity to share with one another the benefits of their experiences in conducting day-to-day counterinsurgency operations.

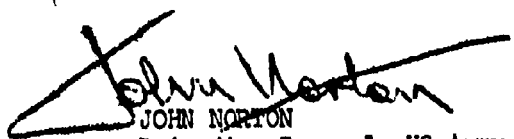
2. It is recognized that tactics and techniques which prove successful in a given area may not render the same results in all sections of the country. However, the United States fighting man, with strong leadership and inherent ingenuity, will quickly recognize and overcome these differences where they exist.

3. Tactics and doctrines set forth in field manuals and taught at service schools are sound; however, the soldier in the field doing the job is in the best position to tell us where improvement and changes in techniques can be made. We are remiss if we fail to take advantage of his knowledge and his combat experience.

4. This document will be published on a continuing basis as additional information becomes available.

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JOHN NORTON
Brigadier General, US Army
Deputy Commanding General

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A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

SECTION I

"LESSONS IN COMBAT"

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The Enemy

Item: The Viet Cong.

Discussion: The opinion that the Viet Cong (VC) is an untrained Army of insurgents is not entirely true. In many areas we find that he is well trained, organized and equipped for his mission. He employs the tactics of the guerrilla in many localities because he is relatively weak and has no other choice and because the terrain favors guerrilla tactics. In many cases enemy forces are untrained, their weapons are modern and effective and he has both combat and combat support elements. His organization is generally triangular in concept with regiments, battalions, companies, platoons and squads. During operations he employs mortars, heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles within the military boundaries designated by his higher headquarters using the ambush and the mass human wave attack as his principal tactics. If cornered he will fight, but more often he will break into small groups and melt into the jungle to fight again another day. He travels with his family on occasion and is not above having women and the children cover his withdrawal, leaving them to fend for themselves. If given a choice he will do most of his fighting at night, moving during darkness, and tunneling under hills to live and store his caches. He uses mines and booby traps extensively around his base area and normally will not come out to attack unless he enjoys a five or six to one superiority. A favorite tactic is to launch an offensive against an isolated post to draw the friendly forces into prepared ambush positions along routes which he knows they must use or advance over to reach the beleaguered post. He is a foe worthy of respect--but he is not ten feet tall, he loses battles so often that he must lose the war.

Observation: Every soldier must strive to "know the enemy", respect his ability, but understand his weaknesses.

Intelligence

Item: Intelligence against the VC is difficult to obtain.

Discussion: In order to "fight" and defeat any enemy you must first "find" and "fix" him. To do this with the VC is one of the most difficult problems facing the US Army in Vietnam. The following points if adhered to, will help solve this problem area:

- a. Make and demand complete reports--What, When, Where, How, Why, and action taken.
- b. Train, organize and employ small, long range and stay-behind patrols.
- c. Use Vietnamese interpreters and check the interpreter by using an American who understands the Vietnamese language.

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- d. Sanitize uniforms and wallets prior to operations.
- e. Insist that all captured or found documents, weapons and materiel be turned in.
- f. Use cameras in the field for gathering intelligence information.
- g. Be continuously security conscious.
- h. Do not conduct excessive reconnaissance of planned operational areas. You may alert the enemy.
- i. Do not start or spread rumors.

Observation: Personnel at all levels must understand the importance of gathering and accurately reporting information about the enemy.

Shotgun

Item: Shotguns have proven to be excellent counter guerrilla weapons.

Discussion: Several shotguns were borrowed from the US Army by the Marines, and evaluated on patrol operations. In one particular encounter with a VC unit, the shotgun carried by the squad in contact delivered immediate devastating fire which accounted for two to four dead VC. Additionally, it has proven its worth on the patrol point.

Observation: Commanders should consider the use of shotguns in the squad.

Beware of

Item: All soldiers should beware of the following:

- a. Dead foliage. It may be old camouflage over a trap.
- b. Tied down brush. It may be a firing lane for an ambush site.
- c. All civilians until they are properly identified.
- d. Villages when no children are visible. It may be an ambush.
- e. Moats around villages. They may contain punji stakes, mines and booby traps.
- f. Booby traps in areas which you reoccupy.
- g. Likely ambush sites. Stay alert.
- h. Obvious by-passes at blown or damaged bridges. They may be mined.

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- i. A decrease in troop alertness during long operations or periods of inactivity. Death comes swiftly in the jungle.
- j. Unpurified water; it likely contains germs.
- k. Indigenous modes of transportation. Taxi drivers have been known to transport GI's to their place of "execution".
- l. Traveling alone outside your base compound. Use the "buddy" system.

Observation: Learn and practice the above listed lessons.

Planning

Item: Operations are sometimes not well planned and completely coordinated with all participating units.

Discussion: Although this is a lesson learned many years ago, it still must be reiterated over and over again. The plan should include use of blocking forces, pinning the enemy against a barrier, effective use of artillery on likely routes of withdrawal, etc. Without such a scheme most VC units can and will avoid contact since the large US units are relatively unwieldy and noisy and can move only as rapidly as the slowest element.

Observation: Operations must be planned as far in advance as possible, and coordinated with all participating forces.

Control

Item: One of the major problems of the commander in jungle terrain is control of committed troops.

Discussion: On battalion-size operations the battalion commander is often hindered by poor ground visibility, and difficulty of communication. Airborne by helicopter he can assist his units in staying on course, spot targets and mark them, and in general have a much better "feel" for the operation. Care must be taken not to give away the location or direction of movement of friendly elements.

Observation: Commanders should make maximum use of the helicopter to assist him in the control of his unit.

Small Unit Operations

Item: Large unit operations are difficult to control in many areas of the Republic of Vietnam.

Discussion: In an area where only small VC units are operating, best results are obtained from separate company and platoon size operations.

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The separate platoon is usually most successful in closing with the enemy. Supporting fires must be planned in detail and a reserve reaction force must be available on short notice. Such operations require the highest caliber of leadership at the platoon level.

Observation: Where the situation permits, a small operational force is preferable to a large one. Selection and training of small unit leaders is a must.

Column Organization

Item: Most contacts in heavy brush and jungle are brief meeting engagements.

Discussion: Due to the nature of the terrain, brief violent fire fights are the rule rather than the exception. It is essential that the men up front react quickly and with a heavy volume of fire.

Observation: Automatic weapons should be habitually placed near the point of the column.

Column Control

Item: Difficulty is encountered in maintaining unit integrity when traversing difficult terrain or crossing obstacles.

Discussion: When crossing streams or defiles in the jungle, there is a tendency for the column to accordion, causing loss of control. Even though it slows the column considerably, the main body must be reassembled on the far side before proceeding.

Observation: It is mandatory that the far side of defiles and streams be secured and that the main body cross before proceeding.

Defense against ambush

Item: Ambush of vehicles is a constant threat in the RVN.

Discussion: Vehicles, both alone and in convoy are frequently ambushed because occupants are not alert. All riders must have their weapons ready for instant use. The senior vehicle occupant should prescribe sectors of observation for all occupants, the method of dismounting and the plan of counterattack. The vehicle floor should be sandbagged. If a radio is present in the vehicle it should be turned on and checked out prior to leaving the unit area. A road can be traversed safely many times, but this does not preclude an ambush at any given time.

Observation: During any vehicular road movement, have a counter-ambush plan; be certain that it is understood by all, and stay alert!

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Immediate Action

Item: Immediate action drills.

Discussion: Immediate action drills should not stop at the rapid reaction to a vehicular ambush and the tactical deployment of troops once disembarked. They should include the rapid delivery of fire into the ambush and the methods of controlling this immediate return fire. Experience has shown that the most efficient manner in which to destroy the effectiveness of an ambush is to immediately deliver an intensive rate of fire to the ambush position rather than maneuver the troops into an assault. Aggressiveness in the initial reaction is the key to the successful defeat of an ambush, particularly where jungle undergrowth limits the utilization of flank security and dictates a heavily weighted load element as point.

Observation: Include delivery of live fire when possible, when conducting immediate action drills during training exercises. Include fire control methods in all immediate action drills.

VC Tactics

Item: That the VC direct their initial fires at soldiers with bipods on their rifles.

Discussion: On several occasions when combat units were deployed on line, moving toward a village, the initial casualties from sniper fire were the AR men. This situation also occurred on several occasions when the point of a unit was hit.

Observation: That unit commanders evaluate the local conditions and consider removal of the AR bipods while conducting offensive type operations.

Defensive Tactics

Item: There is a need for increased emphasis on defensive tactics throughout the educational system of officers and enlisted men.

Discussion: Emphasis has been placed on offensive tactics to the point that we may have overlooked the basic facts that at sometime the defense must be assumed. The small unit commander, notably the platoon commander, often fails to appreciate use of defensive terrain or the proper employment of supporting weapons in the defense.

Observation: Do not emphasize offensive tactics in training to the detriment of the defense.

Intelligence Reports

Item: That intelligence information received from higher echelons is frequently received too late to be effective.

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Discussion: Most intelligence reports received are ISUMS or PIRs which report history and do not provide the using unit with concrete information on which to base future actions in offensive or defensive operations. There is a continuing need for a rapid effective means of disseminating local intelligence to battalions when this information is beyond their limited collection means. Enemy troop movements through TAORs are perhaps the most noteworthy of this void. This information should be more readily available at present, and if not, a means selected whereby it will be available.

Observation: Re-evaluate intelligence means and expedite information to the using unit.

Interpreters/Translators

Item: That continual screening, effective distribution and maximum utilization of interpreters and translators at infantry battalion level is essential to successful counterinsurgency operations.

Discussion: Interpreters are the vital link between US operating forces and the Vietnamese forces and people. Success is directly proportional to the ability to communicate and coordinate with the Vietnamese. Really effective day-to-day communications can only be accomplished through indigenous interpreters. At best, widespread language training among the US military produces limited and stopgap results. Therefore, the maximum number of proficient interpreters must be obtained through careful screening and distribution to the infantry battalion on the basis of 8 to 10 per unit. In addition, these interpreters could have the capability to render quick translation of captured documents for the immediate benefit of the capturing units, as well as reduce the translation burden at higher echelon.

Observation: Although continuing to emphasize Vietnamese language training, emphasize the importance of, and organize the procurement and distribution of, indigenous interpreters to insure optimum utilization at battalion level.

Camera Intelligence

Item: That a requirement exists for a polaroid type camera in the S-2 section of the infantry battalion.

Discussion: Experience in Vietnam is replete with repeated incidents wherein the capability to produce immediate photographic evidence would have provided vital intelligence data with respect to Viet Cong encampments, supplies, equipment, booby traps, etc., as well as invaluable visual aids for the correction of maps and historical records.

Observation: Insure maximum utilization of cameras to obtain photographic evidence.

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Ambush Techniques

Item: There is a need to improve ambush techniques employed against the VC.

Discussion: All too frequently, ambushes are well laid, properly planned, and correctly positioned, only to completely fail because of some single failure on the part of the troop commander. Common deficiencies noted are:

- a. Noise discipline, coughing, talking, shifting about, clattering water canteens, etc.
- b. Springing the ambush too early or with a poor signal.
- c. Lack of sufficient fire power being placed along the entire ambush position, denying escape routes.
- d. Failure to pursue by fire when the victims jump into the underbrush opposite the ambushes.
- e. Failure to quickly exploit and search the immediate area for casualties and dead.
- f. Failure to establish a pre-planned search of the area.
- g. Failure to provide for illumination in conjunction with a swoop after ambush.
- h. Failure to booby-trap or block off opposite sides of the trails and escape routes.
- i. Failure of troop commanders to utilize supporting arms (normally due to lack of communications).

Selection of the ambush site, though important, is only the first step in the development of a well organized ambush. Ambush leaders must be fully capable and provided with the necessary equipment to successfully carry out his assigned mission. Squad leaders must be capable of calling in supporting arms and instructed in methods of blocking escape routes, utilizing booby-traps, demolitions, punji traps or other arms available.

Observation: Develop pocket cards for squad leaders which list the essential elements in requesting mortar, artillery or air, and list the more important techniques to establish an ambush with a check-off list of equipment that can be employed in the average ambush.

Jungle Lane Ranges

Item: Experience has proven that most encounters while on patrol are sudden meeting engagements.

Discussion: Meeting engagements of small units on patrol have been the most frequent contact throughout all TAORs. Initially, reaction by the

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point was not rapid enough to deliver fire at the elusive VC along trails. With practice, increased kills are being realized. Jungle lane type ranges with numerous surprise targets, have been a successful training device in reflex conditioning and increasing "Snapfire" marksmanship.

Observation: That extensive use of Jungle Lane type ranges be emphasized throughout the Combat Marksmanship Program.

VC Tactics

Item: VC escape method.

Discussion: The VC, when cornered underground and discovery is certain, will eject a grenade from a hole or aperture and during the resulting shock and smoke, attempt to escape.

Observation: Troops must be alert to spot these escapes after isolated grenade explosions.

Land Navigation

Item: Inaccurate maps and terrain that limits observation makes land navigation very difficult.

Discussion: The inaccuracies of the maps and, on occasion, the dense underbrush have repeatedly pointed out the need for stressed instruction in basic land navigation, particularly in the use of the compass.

Observation: Increased emphasis on land navigation instruction at all levels.

Debarkation From Helicopters

Item: That embarkation and debarkation of personnel is expedited by elimination of seats in the helicopters.

Discussion: Even with a predesignated seat, a soldier laden with a weapon and ammunition, as well as a cartridge belt crowded with canteen, poncho, etc., consumes valuable time in positioning and belting himself in the helicopter and releasing himself after the aircraft lands. In an environment where every minute a helicopter spends in the landing zone increases its vulnerability, the removal or strapping up of seats in the helicopter enables the squad to embark and distribute itself on the deck of the plane quickly and emerge in a similar manner, thus appreciably reducing the "on ground" time of the aircraft.

Observation: Discontinue the use of seats in troop helicopters in a counterinsurgency combat environment.

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Village Searches

Item: That routine village searches by patrols have not proven to be a successful means of uncovering the VC or his supply caches.

Discussion: Village search techniques have not been stressed sufficiently to fully inform the soldier of the numerous techniques that should be employed to perform this task efficiently. Even after repeated searches of villages with troops qualified by experience, the task is often unsuccessful. The most successful means yet discovered has been to occupy the village for ten days to two weeks, forcing the hidden VC to come above ground from his hideout to seek food and water. Basic training must be conducted to overcome to a certain degree the inhibited feeling that the average American has when going through others private property. They should honor others belongings but search thoroughly without reservation. Basic techniques which have met with a measure of success are:

a. On entering the village:

- (1) Always leave a covering force behind.
- (2) Avoid being channelized into a single direction by fences, hedges, punji-traps, etc.
- (3) Utilize villagers to proceed you. They will avoid booby-traps, punji-traps and VC fields of fire.
- (4) If villagers flee at your presence, it is a good indication of a sizable VC force's presence.

b. In the villages, booby-traps are normally found:

- (1) On gates, either as an explosive device, or chest-high counter-weight driven bamboo stakes.
- (2) Punji traps are wherever normal work does not take place as well as next to trails, in graveyards and near shrines. Normally emplaced in groups of three.
- (3) In and amongst rubbish, on boards near punji stakes, planks along the trail.

c. When searching, especially look at:

- (1) Rafters.
- (2) Thatched roofs.
- (3) Rice bags.

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(4) Hay stacks.

(5) Dung piles.

(6) Wells

d. When villagers or VC are found hiding in tunnels or bunkers, have the local villagers go in to talk them out. Do not go in after the VC unless it is absolutely necessary.

e. Village search techniques differ from city search techniques during clearing operations. There is not the cover in grass and adobe structures that we teach in house-to-house fighting; (Example: one marine threw a grenade into a room and stood next to the grass wall waiting for the detonation. He was, of course, wounded by the fragments).

Observation: Orient soldiers more thoroughly in proper search and clear methods and village search techniques in guerrilla warfare.

VC Tactics

Item: VC harboring sites.

Discussion: When conducting sweep operations, ambushes or saturation patrolling operations, particular attention must be paid to trails, draws, bases of hills and streams. The VC travel trails almost exclusively. Most areas are a series of complex trails and the guerrilla is usually familiar with all of the trails, thus facilitating his movement throughout the area. When he sets up a harboring site, it is normally somewhere close to fresh water. Draws at the base of a hill with water present are favorite harboring sites. Constant pressures can be applied to the guerrilla by hitting his harboring sites and keeping him off guard.

Observation: That this information be emphasized in the teaching of counter guerrilla operations.

Pursuit By Fire

Item: That units must continue the pursuit by fire after the enemy has broken off the attack at night.

Discussion: The VC unit conducting the night attack will often break off the attack and stop firing. If the friendly units stop firing at that time also, the VC will use the lull in the battle to his advantage to slip out to the friendly lines to recover dead, wounded and weapons. Therefore, continued small arms, automatic weapons and supporting harassing fires should saturate the battlefield and along likely routes of withdrawal to obtain the maximum amount of enemy casualties as he attempts to police the battlefield.

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Observation: Continued stress on night defensive fires in training - particularly in coordination with use of illumination.

VC Tactics

Item: That tactics and techniques demonstrated by VC elements encountered are generally designed to exploit the US-concentrated effort to kill VC as well as deceive and disrupt planned operations.

Discussion: Relying on the kill emphasis, VC elements have displayed an increasing readiness to offer bait, i.e., exposure at a distance, sniper fire and open smoke fires, etc., in an effort to draw patrols either into ambushes, a crossfire from prepared positions, booby-trapped areas or away from established base camps and other guerrilla facilities.

Observation: Unless complete surprise is achieved, response to VC harassment must be tempered with a realization that such tactics may be an attempt to induce precipitous reaction with a subsequent goal of entrapment or distraction.

Barbed Wire

Item: The VC have proven themselves proficient in breaching wire entanglements when the wire is not supplemented with detection devices.

Discussion: Each soldier, as he undergoes individual combat training, is taught the basic of breaching double apron and concertina barbed wire entanglements. The VC practice this thoroughly and have experienced little or no difficulty in breaching tactical and defensive wire which is not covered by a detection means, i.e., AN/TPS-21, seismic intrusion detection, trip flares, mines or periodic unscheduled illumination.

Conclusion: The employment of barbed wire, as always, is not intended to stop a determined enemy, only to slow him down. It must always be employed with a means of detecting the approach of the enemy and covered by an effective fire delivery system.

Weapons Safety

Item: That it is mandatory to conduct continuous daily individual training in weapons safety, the handling of ordnance available to the infantry battalion, procedures for challenging, the use of the challenge and password and the rules of engagement.

Discussion: The cold statistics on the number of injuries and deaths resulting from one or more of the above clearly substantiates this requirement. Individual soldiers, except for formal annual range shooting, rarely possess live ordnance and because of this lack of intimate association have a tendency to display a lack of respect for basic safety.

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regulations which is only emphasized by a combat environment. Continuing stress must be placed on safety to include repeated checks of weapons to insure compliance, daily instruction in regulations and the above mentioned topics which are closely allied to the safety theme, and the elimination of "accidental casualties".

Observation: All training should incorporate renewed emphasis on the subjects listed in the above item.

Field Expedient - M-14 Sling

Item: That the M-14 web sling is adaptable as a shoulder harness, enabling the weapon to be carried at the ready at all times.

Discussion: Extended counterinsurgency patrol operations require a continuous instantaneous reaction capability. To facilitate an at-the-ready posture, individual experiments have demonstrated that the average patrol member is better prepared to fulfill his mission by carrying the M-14 or M-14 (Modified) slung from his shoulder, utilizing the web sling affixed to the pistol grip on one end and the sling swivel at the other, thus permitting the weapon to hang free on or near his hip where its position and direction can be controlled during movement by one hand on the pistol grip. This arrangement reduces arm fatigue imposed by port arms or any arm carry technique, keeps the weapon constantly in a ready position and permits rapid reaction fire.

Observation: Experiment to achieve a standard shoulder harness utilizing the present web sling and incorporate in instructional program of counterinsurgency training.

Counterinsurgency Training

Item: Need for counterinsurgency to be taught to all personnel in a leadership position.

Discussion: The enlisted personnel presently in Vietnam have not been taught counterinsurgency. They are well versed in counter guerrilla operations but have a lack of understanding when it comes to civic action visits to villages. The platoon commanders have a working knowledge of counterinsurgency. There is a definite need for counterinsurgency to be taught at all our stateside and overseas schools. The enlisted personnel down to squad leader must be taught the overall picture of what the government is trying to accomplish in Vietnam. In this connection, everyone should receive basic instruction on religious customs and superstitions of the people of the area in which they are working.

Observation: That all NCO schools begin to teach counterinsurgency operations. That a more dynamic program of area study be conducted prior to arrival into Asian countries.

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Small Unit Operations

Item: Emphasis on use of small units in operations against the guerrilla.

Discussion: Evaluation of experience gained to date has brought forth renewed emphasis on the role of the small unit in operations against the guerrilla. During hours of daylight the most successful tactic has been saturation patrolling with the use of a reaction force. The saturation of an area with squad size patrols allows maximum coverage and maximum utilization of leadership capabilities of small unit leaders. It requires detailed planning by the company or higher echelon to completely coordinate the number of patrols in an area. The smaller units have a better chance of daylight contact with the guerrilla. A force larger than a platoon size will normally force the guerrilla into hiding or evasion techniques. The guerrilla is more apt to engage the squad or platoon than he is the larger force. During hours of darkness the squad is the most practical sized unit to conduct a night ambush. The squad has better noise and fire discipline than the larger sized unit. Being smaller, it has a better chance of moving into the ambush site undetected than a larger force.

Observation: Place renewed emphasis on squad training especially in the area of patrolling and ambushes.

VC Tactics/Operations

Item: The VC guerrilla has prepared covert mortar firing positions for use without the base plates.

Discussion: Mortar firing positions have been located by patrols whereby the VC have dug a cylindrical angled hole into the ground into which a mortar tube is inserted for firing. A rock, wooden block or other similar rigid base absorbs the impact normally taken by the base plate. The hole is angled so that no aiming is required on their selected target. In this manner, several quick rounds can be fired into a CP, assembly area, supply dump, etc., and the guerrilla can flee quickly, blending into the populace, leaving the camouflaged weapon behind.

Observation: That emphasis be given to the unconventional means of weapons employment utilized by the VC. As each new technique is discovered, rapid dissemination be made to all interested parties.

Repetition of Activity

Item: That although it is a basic principle, continuing emphasis must be placed upon the danger of establishing a pattern of operations or any repetitive type of activity.

Discussions: In a counterinsurgency environment, where the guerrilla inflicts the maximum damage by secrecy and surprise, repetition and

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routine court disaster. The most invariable law of counterinsurgency operations is variety; (it applies to all details, i.e., motor transport routine movements, meal hours, guard reliefs, etc), and cannot be over-emphasized.

Observation: All counterinsurgency training stress avoidance of routine of pattern.

VC Tactics/Mines

Item: The VC guerrilla rarely prepares mixed AP and AT mine fields.

Discussion: On the few occasions that AT type mines have been discovered, we have yet to encounter a mixed field. When AT mines are employed, they are placed exclusively on roads and trails capable of carrying vehicular type traffic. AP type mines are employed, however, on the defensible terrain nearby, so that infantrymen taking to the high ground to protect a disabled vehicle are then subjected to the AP mines and booby trap devices.

Observation: Stress the requirement for constant vigilance against AP mines and booby traps on nearby trails and defensible terrain whenever AT mines are encountered.

Securing The Landing Zone

Item: Where the enemy has concealed approach routes, the practice of securing an LZ by "perimeter defense" tactics employing the first lift, makes this element vulnerable to an enemy assault.

Discussion: This practice also precludes effective prestrikes for subsequent lifts. Immediately upon landing, the first lift should move out as a tactical unit toward its objective or if it is designated to provide landing zone security for succeeding lifts, it should execute the following two actions: (1) Dispatch pre-briefed scout teams to reconnoiter the landing zone perimeter; and (2) consolidate the remainder of the force into a strong point located off the landing zone itself. This latter force should be prepared to attack any forces which attempt to interfere with the landing of subsequent lifts. These two actions will reduce the vulnerability which exists when a thin line perimeter is used and will also permit continuous prestriking of the landing zone. It will also allow for immediate assembly of the lift into a maneuverable assault unit.

Observation: The landed units must assume an offensive rather than a defensive posture.

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A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

SECTION II

"LESSONS IN COMBAT SUPPORT"

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Artillery Fire Direction

Item: Fire direction procedures for a reinforced artillery battalion in a guerrilla warfare environment.

Discussion: The subject environment has required the displacement of an average of one battery per day, with up to four displacements per day; the employment of batteries by platoons with different directions of fire; with technical fire direction of separated platoons from the battalion FDC, and the ability to fire and/or mass fires quickly anywhere in a complete circle. Although technical fire direction is normally centralized only for weapons organic to the battalion, the requirement still exists for the battalion FDC to be able to produce or check firing data for any attached weapons. Two lessons were learned: First, that standard FDC chart procedures are not suitable for the above organization and situation; second, that certain firing battery procedures had to be revised to cope with the situation.

Solution:

Firing Chart. The length and width of the firing chart must be twice the maximum range of the longest shooting weapon system in the composite unit. All data is taken from a grid intersection at the center of the chart, and permanent azimuth/deflection indices are drawn on the chart every 100 mils. The indices are each approximately two inches in length, drawn so that the ends protrude above and below the mil arc of the range deflection protractor. Each index is labeled at the top with grid azimuth and at the bottom with deflection. All calibers use the same referred deflection at any azimuth; in this case, the chart system is based on all batteries being laid on grid azimuth 6400, referred deflection 2600. Therefore, the chart index at azimuth 6400 is labeled 64 at the top and 26 at the bottom. The rest are labeled accordingly. Only the right-most 100 mil increment on the mil arc of the RDP is used, with the right-most 100 mil graduation to its left labeled zero. To read azimuth to the nearest 100 mil (which will be sent to the battery in the fire command), merely look at the relationship of the left edge of the arm of the RDP to the labeled indices; to read deflection, the hundred value is one hundred less than the number that can be seen immediately adjacent to the left edge of the arm of the RDP. Tens and units values are read from the right-most 100 mil increment on the mil arc of the RDP, from left to right, using the index that falls within that increment. To compensate for the actual locations of the firing batteries relative to the center of the firing chart a template is constructed from transparent grid sheet material, on which the center of the chart and all battery centers are plotted in their actual locations. This template is then turned upside down, and is always used in this upside down orientation. To obtain chart data, the center of the template is placed over the target, the grid lines of the template are then aligned exactly parallel to the grid lines on the firing chart, the vertex of the RDP at the center of the chart, and then a map pin is stuck in the template location of the battery. The RDP is

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then used to determine range and deflection of the pin at this location. Chart data for other batteries is obtained by shifting the pin to the template location of those batteries. Miscellaneous chart procedures, such as data for replot and conversion of observed firing data to surveyed data, can be accomplished by several techniques that can be derived if the basic concepts are understood.

Firing Battery Procedures. Firing battery procedures are modified to complement the revised chart procedures. Two sets of aiming posts (with night lighting devices) are mandatory to eliminate potential problems. Aiming posts are put out 3200 mils apart at the referred deflections corresponding to the azimuth of lay. For example, if laid on azimuth 6400, the aiming posts would be put out at deflection 2600; however, if laid on azimuth 6300, the aiming posts would be put out at deflection 2700. Because firing is so frequently done in directions opposite the initial azimuth of lay, it has been found that an azimuth reference system for the chief of section not only reduces the possibility of errors - particularly in night firing - but also speeds the rough lay when trails are shifted. Therefore, azimuth reference stakes are set out every 800 mils around each piece, and the azimuth of fire (to the nearest 100 mils) is included as the second element of the command from FDC. Other firing battery procedures remain unchanged.

FDC Organization. The school and textbook solution for the physical organization of the FDC has been improved upon. Every element of the FDC must be organized so that nothing can interfere with the passage of fire missions, data and commands between the FDC, RTO's, HCO's VCO and computers. One physical organization that satisfies this requirement is to have all these individuals facing inboard with their equipment, and no walkways between. When the FDC will remain in a semi-permanent location, all equipment, such as charts, radio remotes, EE-8's and maps can be mounted on one central table specially constructed to accommodate these items and to complement the functioning of the FDC.

Observations: Artillery S-3's consider the adoption of the above techniques.

60MM Mortars

Item: Experimental use of 60MM Mortars with small patrols has proven its effectiveness.

Discussion: 81MM mortars were taken on company-size patrols during April 1965 as an immediate area fire weapon for use against targets in excess of the range of the M-79 or 3.5 rockets. It was soon discovered that the size and bulk of the 81MM mortar made it extremely difficult for the patrol to maintain an acceptable rate of march. 60MM mortars were appropriated on a loan basis and subsequently employed with small patrols. Accurate fire was quickly delivered. It is capable of being set up for firing in one-fourth of the time required for an 81MM mortar, and the crew

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was reduced to six per weapon. The light weight of the 60MM mortar and its ammunition make it a highly desirable weapon in the rough terrain and tropical climate of Vietnam. Its capability to fire direct or indirect fire at targets beyond the range of M-79's or 3.5 rockets, but which do not warrant artillery or air support because of target value or time factor, is evident.

Observation: When available a section of 60MM mortars should be taken on rifle company patrols.

Reconnaissance of Landing Zones

Item: In some cases LZ reconnaissance practices are neither adequate nor commensurate with operational requirements.

Discussion: Reconnaissance immediately prior to an airmobile operation should be fitted into the general pattern. Aggressive use should be made of Rangers, Special Forces, reconnaissance companies, pathfinder teams, etc., equipped with superior communications. These units must be used rapidly to probe potential enemy positions, and to gain definite intelligence with minimum exposure of our own resources. Better and continuous use of aerial photographs should be made.

Observation: That reconnaissance be made on a continuing basis, and surveillance be updated on available LZ's.

Artillery Support/Airmobile Operations

Item: There should be more artillery support for airmobile operations.

Discussion: Whenever feasible, artillery should be deployed to positions from which fire support can be rendered to the airmobile force. If artillery is not available, fire support must be provided by mortars or continuous close air support. The heliborne command post must be able to shift artillery fire in order to integrate these fires with the overall support of the assault force.

Observation: With the advent of longer range artillery into the theater, i.e., 8-inch howitzer and 175MM gun, in addition to the airlift capability of the 105MM howitzer, this capability will be enhanced.

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A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

SECTION III

"LESSONS IN COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT"

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Canteen

Item: That the need exists to replace the metal canteen with the plastic canteen.

Discussion: The plastic canteen presently in the supply system has proven decidedly superior to the metal canteen. Lighter in weight, it reduces the overall individual load and completely eliminates metallic noises incident to the handling of the current canteen.

Observation: Expedite the issue of the plastic canteen to all units presently serving in combat areas.

Body Armor

Item: That body armor is unsuitable for strenuous activity in hot and humid climates.

Discussion: Body armor caused an unacceptable number of heat casualties when worn while undergoing even minimal physical activity. It does not permit circulation of air nor absorb sufficient moisture to support an efficient body cooling process. The weight and bulkiness hampered the freedom of movement required on patrol.

Observation: Body armor to be worn only while engaged in non-strenuous activity, i.e., helicopter reconnaissance, manning defensive positions and troop vehicular movement.

Head Gear

Item: That the current Army head gear, both the helmet and baseball cap have proven inadequate for extensive and intensive offensive type counter-insurgency operations in a tropical climate.

Discussion: The steel helmet generates and retains heat, impairs hearing and is uncomfortable. Similarly, the current fatigue cap offers no protection from the heat on the top or back of the head, neck or lower face. In the monsoon weather the present cover will not shed water properly, causing additional discomfort to the wearer. Wearing of either of the aforementioned head pieces during patrol operations resulted in a daily average of two heat casualties while during a local three week experiment with a brimmed hat, heat casualties were reduced by half, although the scope and intensity of patrols increased and the weather was appreciably warmer.

Observations: That a high crowned, broad-brimmed, well-ventilated hat be developed for combat operations in tropical climates.

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Counterinsurgency Officer

Item: That the need exists for a special staff officer on the battalion and brigade levels designated as the Counterinsurgency Officer.

Discussion: Experience has shown that one staff officer should be given the additional duty as Counterinsurgency Officer. The functions of this officer fall within both the area of the S-2 and Legal/Civil Affairs Officer. The Counterinsurgency Officer's duties would include maintaining listings of the villages and hamlets and size of the Popular Force units in each village. The CI Officer acts as coordinator with village and district chiefs in such areas as intelligence from the local populace, coordinator of operations and security with Popular Forces and supervisor of the people to people program. Therefore he should have a working knowledge of the Vietnamese language. The Legal/Civil Affairs Officer serves as an assistant to the CI Officer. This system has proven very effective in the area of control.

Observation: That the additional duty of counterinsurgency officer be assigned to each battalion and brigade S-2.

Medical/Civil Affairs

Item: The need for training of indigenous personnel for use as aid men by medical elements attached to Army units.

Discussion: When operating in an area with a civilian populace present and the need for a civic action arises, the doctor and his team are normally called upon for duty. The need for a doctor operating in a village is readily apparent but there is also a need for sem-trained personnel to help in the village on a daily basis. This can be accomplished by seeking the advice of the village chief and asking him for nominations of two or three people that can act as nurses or aid men. Classes can be held in Vietnamese for selected personnel from the surrounding villages. In this way, wounds can be cleansed, bandages changed, salves applied and prescribed medicines administered between visits by doctors. However, the real long range goal of this program is getting the people used to helping themselves by providing a means by which they can do so and to gain the respect and admiration of the people, in addition to obtaining valuable intelligence information.

Observation: That this be incorporated in the Field Medical training program that doctors and aid men receive prior to reporting to a field unit.

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Personnel and Administration

Item: Unit strength must be maintained at near 100% to maintain efficiency in RVN.

Discussion: It is readily apparent that a unit must be up to TOE strength for commitment to extended operations. A unit which is initially short of personnel and which suffers normal losses through death, injury, and rotations will stay below an efficient operation level. A system is needed whereby committed units receive a rapid input of personnel. Personnel shortages are especially significant when a unit has to operate in unsecured areas, or when a unit is split between a primary and forward position and must provide security for both - as happens frequently in this area. In addition to rapid input, a rotation system must be developed which will keep pace with the personnel situation. In many instances, personnel rotate to CONUS without contact replacements. This is a critical situation for a unit, because many are specialists, and failure to replace an MOS skill with a contact relief can lead to breakdowns in the system.

Observation: Replacements must be requisitioned far enough in advance to allow a break-in period.

Battery Life

Item: Reduced battery life.

Discussion: The extreme heat and the lack of refrigeration for dry cell batteries reduces their useful life significantly. A thirty-day supply may debilitate to ten or fifteen days.

Observation: Protect batteries from the weather. Where possible, use old batteries first.

Medical Evacuation

Item: Casualty evacuation must be expedited.

Discussion: The chain of evacuation for friendly casualties, as well as ARVN and civilian personnel must be promulgated to all concerned down to the aid man well in advance and reiterated on a timely basis. All ARVN and civilian casualties must be evacuated to Vietnamese medical facilities available. American casualties follow the normal evacuation chain.

Observation: Insure that the evacuation system for civilians as well as US military is understood by all medical personnel concerned with this function.

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Resupply

Item: Resupply in remote areas is a critical problem in RVN.

Discussion: Due to the lack of road or rail systems in most areas of Vietnam, the primary means of resupply is by air. All planning for operations in these areas must include plans for Low Level Extraction (LOLEX) if helicopters or landing zones are not available. A Supply Demand Code to abbreviate resupply requests must also be developed and used since many initial requests must be transmitted over limited communication nets.

Observations: The problem of resupply during operations is a major one in RVN. Units must develop techniques for aerial resupply and insure that it is included in all operational planning.

Personal Effects

Item: Storage facilities are scarce in RVN.

Discussion: Provisions must be made for the storage of non-essential uniforms and personal gear outside of the objective area. The maximum number of fatigues and other field equipment should be brought by each individual, however, only a minimum of summer service uniforms. Duffel bags which are exposed to the elements quickly mildew in this climate which is ruinous to uniform clothing, therefore provisions must be made for storage under cover.

Observation: Only those necessary items of clothing should accompany personnel to RVN.

Ammunition Exposure

Item: That unnecessary exposure of ammunition causes it to deteriorate rapidly in a tropical climate.

Discussion: It has been discovered that ammunition, particularly linked machine gun, corrodes rapidly with the links rusting overnight. Carrying belts of ammunition "Pancho Villa" style draped over the body accelerates the corroding process due to perspiration.

Observation: That proper ammunition storage techniques be practiced at all times in training and checked daily in the ordnance inspection within units in the combat area.

M-79 Marking Round

Item: That a requirement exists for an M-79 marking round, smoke and/or white phosphorus, to designate intermediate targets.

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Discussion: To augment the organic mortars which mark targets beyond 1000 meters, and the grenade, rifle or hand, which mark "close in" targets, there is a need for a M-79 round to indicate intermediate targets, i.e., 500 meters, particularly for the rapid employment of MH-1R's as gunships in support of patrols.

Observation: Procurement of an M-79 marking round, smoke and/or white phosphorus.

Staging Areas

Item: The use of single staging areas and stereotyped flight patterns results in increasing risks to helicopters.

Discussion: In the areas of increased activity by VC forces, staging areas may become vulnerable to pre-planned attacks. Multiple staging areas must be pre-planned and pre-stocked whenever possible. Flight patterns must vary sufficiently so as not to establish an operational pattern. Alternate routes must be selected for each LZ based on current intelligence, weather, terrain, etc.

Observation: Staging areas should be selected on the basis of accessibility to the area of tactical operations, logistics, and security.

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